

# VIRGINIA SALTWATER FISHING TOURNAMENT



The Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament, which was inaugurated in 1958 to promote and develop Virginia's abundant recreational fishing resources, is the premier state-sponsored angling awards program in the country. Over the years it has significantly enhanced the quality, quantity, and enjoyment of fishing in Virginia, and it has served as a model for similar programs in other states.

## PROGRAM AWARDS

Anglers who catch fish meeting established minimum weights, or who catch and release fish meeting established length criteria, are awarded handsome wall plaques, called Citations. There are no entry fees for the program and no preregistration requirements, although participants must possess a valid Virginia saltwater fishing license, must be fishing from a boat or pier which possesses the appropriate "blanket" saltwater fishing license, or must be exempt from licensing due to age. Eligible species of fish total 34, ranging from the diminutive spot to bruising blue marlin, and 16 species are eligible for special "release" awards. Eleven species of fish, including all billfish, sharks, red drum and black drum are only eligible for awards if they are released.

To register a catch for a Citation the angler must weigh his fish, or enter his release, at

one of over 100 designated weigh stations located primarily at marinas, tackle shops and piers throughout the state. If the fish qualifies, the angler will be mailed a Citation plaque at the end of the year. Anglers are eligible to earn one Citation plaque per species, annually.

## PROGRAM HISTORY

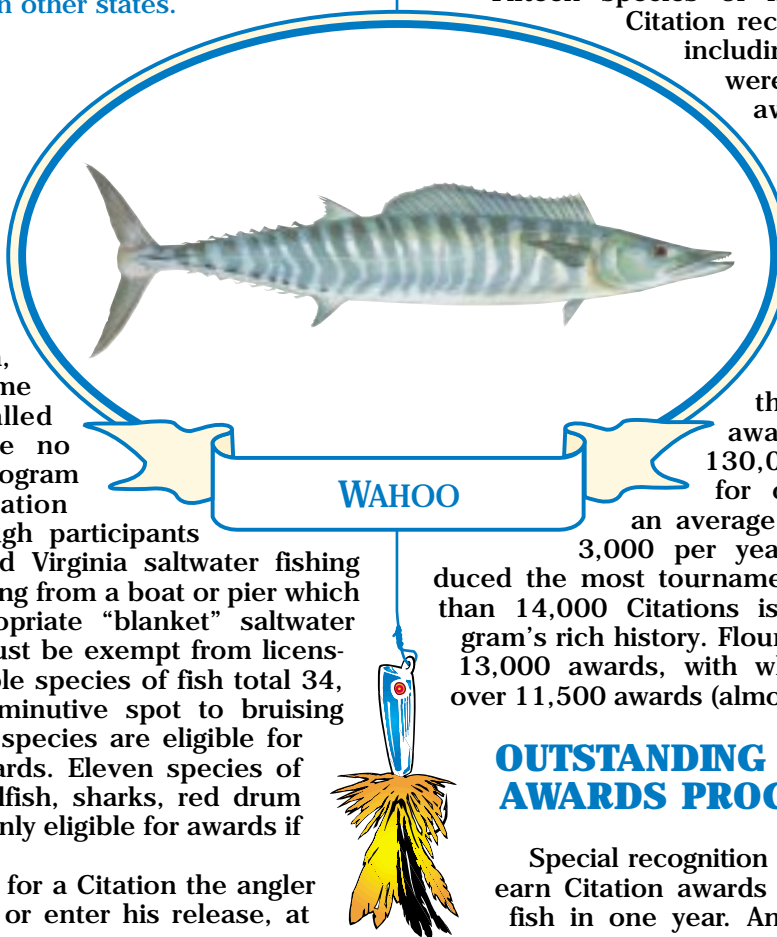
On May 1, 1958 Governor Lindsay J. Almond initiated the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament with a ceremonial "first cast" in the waters off Ocean View in the city of Norfolk.

Fifteen species of fish were eligible for Citation recognition the first year, including white marlin which were eligible for release awards, making the Tournament one of the first to provide recognition for releasing trophy fish alive. Anglers registered 500 fish for Citation awards during its inaugural year.

Since its inception, the Tournament has awarded more than 130,000 Citation plaques for outstanding catches—an average of slightly more than 3,000 per year. Bluefish have produced the most tournament awards, with more than 14,000 Citations issued during the program's rich history. Flounder have yielded over 13,000 awards, with white marlin producing over 11,500 awards (almost all for released fish).

## OUTSTANDING ANGLER AWARDS PROGRAM

Special recognition is given to anglers who earn Citation awards for several species of fish in one year. Anyone winning Citation



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awards for 6 different species of fish in a single year, automatically qualifies as a Virginia Expert Saltwater Angler. The angler receives a certificate and a specially designed silver pin to mark his achievement.

Virginia also recognizes the accomplishments of anglers over longer periods of time with its Virginia Master Saltwater Angler award. This award is based upon the cumulative number of Citations an angler earns over a period of years. To qualify an angler must earn 25 Citations in a minimum of five species, with credit given for a maximum of only one Citation per species per year. Anglers have an unlimited period of time to accumulate their Citations, starting in 1996—the year this program was instituted. Recipients receive a certificate and a specially designed gold-plate pin. Additional levels of recognition are accorded to anglers when their citation total reaches 50 with a minimum of 10 different species and 75 with 15 different species.

## CHESAPEAKE BAY GRAND SLAM

In order to recognize exceptional angling achievement and a commitment to conservation, the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament began offering a special award in 1999. Anglers catching and releasing a red drum, black drum, and a cobia meeting the minimum requirements for release Citations in a single day (24 hour period) can earn a Chesapeake Bay Grand Slam award.

## STATE RECORD PROGRAM

The Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament maintains and certifies state records for more than 50 species of marine game fish commonly found in Virginia waters. Special "State Record" Citations are awarded to anglers who catch fish that are certified as new records.

Registering a fish for state record recognition is not complicated, but the requirements must be strictly followed. Potential state record fish must be weighed on the scales of an official weigh station of the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament and all aspects of the catch must conform to the rules of the Tournament. In addition, the special state record application form must be filled out in its entirety and must be accompanied by a clear, side-view photograph of the fish. Finally, the actual fish must be preserved and viewed by a member of the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament State Record Committee. Weigh stations and anglers should contact the Tournament Director or a member of the committee as soon as possible of potential record fish. These officials will assist in the weighing of the fish and the completion of the necessary paperwork. Each weigh station has a state record folder with complete information about state record requirements and a list of all members of the State Record Committee.



## JUNIOR ANGLER PROGRAM

One of the most popular programs operated by the Tournament is the Junior Angler Awards Program. The program seeks to encourage youngsters to enjoy saltwater fishing and develop a conservation ethic by releasing fish alive.

Open to all children under the age of sixteen, this program challenges youths to catch and release six species of saltwater fish during the year. Participation in this program is free. There are no minimum size limits and almost all species of fish qualify.

Junior Angler Cards, with space for the participants to record their catches and releases, are available at most Tournament weigh stations and from the Tournament office. When a youth has completed the requirements and filled out the card, the card should be returned to the Tournament office and the Junior Angler Award will be shipped in a few weeks. Successful youngsters receive a handsome certificate, suitable for framing, signed by Virginia's governor along with a hat and decals featuring the program's logo.

## INFORMATION

More information and brochures about the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament, the State Record Program, the Junior Angler Awards and fishing opportunities and facilities in Virginia can be obtained from:

Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament  
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The Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament, Virginia State Record Program and all of the angling awards programs are a division of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission.

